

House Armed Services Committee

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DOD Defends Missile Defense Budget Before HASC Subcommittee

Washington D.C.—Today the Strategic Forces Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee heard testimony from Department of Defense representatives concerning their fiscal year 2006 budget request for Ballistic Missile Defense Programs.

Ranking Member, Silvestre Reyes (TX), delivered the following opening statement:

“Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also want to thank Lt. General Obering, Lt. General Dodgen, and Mr. Duma for joining us today.

“Mr. Chairman, although we have several contentious issues in our subcommittee’s jurisdiction, our members, following your example, are able to have differences in opinion without letting the debate turn ugly. I applaud you for that leadership – we may need it exercised again today.

“This morning we will discuss a contentious issue: whether or not the proposed Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) system is ready to be declared operationally deployable. Is GMD ready, without advance notice, to intercept nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) heading into any one of our 50 states?

“Before we get into this discussion, I want to explain how I personally frame the issue. This context is not for the sake of the Members of this Subcommittee; even when we may disagree about a defense issue, we do not question each other’s commitment to defending our nation. Rather, I do this for the sake of the general public, because too often Democrats are painted as reflexively and unalterably opposed to missile defense.

“I am a strong supporter of missile defense, including the GMD system already being deployed in Alaska and California. I think we will eventually prove that this system will be an effective insurance policy against a limited ICBM threat. Moreover, BMD systems that protect or will protect our troops on the front-lines – such as PAC-3, THAAD, and Aegis BMD – enjoy broad and strong bipartisan support.

“In 1999, H.R. 4, a bill co-authored by two of our colleagues, Curt Weldon and John Spratt, came to the House floor for a vote. H.R. 4 simply stated: *“It is the policy of*

the United States to deploy a national missile defense system.” Period. End of story. No caveats. A majority of House Democrats – let me repeat that—a majority of House Democrats voted for that measure.

“On my side of the aisle, we do not have as much consensus on a national missile defense system as does your side, Mr. Chairman. Fair enough. But somehow, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, there is a widespread perception that all Democrats oppose missile defense, especially a national missile defense system. That is flat-out wrong.

“I provide this context because today many members will ask tough questions on GMD. And even though I strongly support GMD, and even though I believe it is important for our nation to have a national missile defense system in place, I too will ask tough questions. Because even though I support GMD, I do not think we should give it a blank check or allow it to avoid thorough testing.

“On the contrary, the very fact that GMD will be the last line of defense to protect our citizens against a nuclear-tipped ICBM is exactly why it should undergo strenuous testing.

On August 18, 2004, our commander-in-chief said:

“We say to those tyrants who believe they can blackmail America and the free world, ‘You fire, we’re going to shoot it down.’

“Since that statement, the GMD interceptor has unfortunately failed twice, once in December and again in February, unable to even leave the launch pad. If we go back further, to December 2002, and just look at intercept flight tests, the system is now 0 for 3. In baseball, you’d be sent back to the dugout.

“I agree 100% with the President’s goal of an effective defense against a limited ICBM threat from a nation such as North Korea. But while GMD holds promise, it remains unproven.

“I do not see this issue as a question of “Are you for this system or not?” The question before us is: Do we let successful flight tests dictate when we declare this system to be operationally ready, or do we let our desire for a defense – no matter how sincere and well-intentioned – take precedence over cold hard facts?

“I am not discouraged by the last three test failures. I say regroup in the dugout and go get another turn in the batter’s box. But on the other hand, we should not pretend that GMD is an All-Star system when it is still in development in the minor leagues. You can ruin a ballplayer by rushing him to the Big Leagues, and you can ruin this system by making it run before it can even prove it can walk.

“Mr. Chairman, I believe it is important to clarify what exactly the issue is before we have a passionate debate about it. I thank you for the opportunity to set the context as I see it, and for calling this important hearing. I look forward to the testimony of our distinguished witnesses.”

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